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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
1993 Substantive session
Agenda item 2 (c) (ii)*

CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS: IMPROVED ORGANIZATION OF
WORK AND EFFECTIVE USE OF CONFERENCE RESOURCES

Measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness
of the use of conference-servicing resources: consultations
between the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and the
chairmen of organs whose utilization factor was lower than
the benchmark figure for the last three years

Report by the Secretariat

1. In paragraphs 10 and 11 of its resolution 47/202 A, the General Assembly endorsed the decision of the Committee on Conferences to request its Chairman to consult on its behalf with the chairmen of organs concerned, where the utilization factor was lower than the established benchmark figure for the last three years, requested the Committee on Conferences to report the results of such consultations to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session and decided that such consultations should be held with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources and rationalizing the duration and frequency of conference-servicing time allocated, taking into account the high costs of conference-servicing and the demands placed upon the Organization.

2. On 1 June 1993, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences addressed a letter regarding the above-mentioned consultations and the reasons for them to the Chairmen of the Committee on Information, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and the Trade and Development Board of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The following report focuses on the consultations that were subsequently held with the Chairmen of the first three bodies referred to. The results of the consultations held with the President of the Trade and Development Board will be issued in an addendum to the present report.

* A/AC.172/150/Add.1.

Committee on Information

3. On 25 June 1993, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences met with the Chairman of the Committee on Information, who provided details about the specific conditions and requirements of that body. In recent years, owing to the enhanced role of the United Nations, interest in the Committee on Information had increased substantially. Consequently, the Committee devoted much of its time to briefing the Department of Public Information and other offices about relevant matters. The number of reports requested had increased. Interest was further reflected, inter alia, by the growing membership and number of requests for membership of the Committee. As a result, the general debate in the Committee had been considerably amplified.

4. The Chairman of the Committee on Information was informed that cancellations of meetings were not reflected in the utilization statistics where sufficient prior notice had been given so as to enable conference services to be reassigned. In that regard, the importance of making realistic estimates of meeting requirements was emphasized. While a firm guarantee could not be made, in most cases it would be possible within a body's entitlement to service meetings that had not been included in the estimates if the need later arose.

5. As to adjourning meetings early, it was frequently useful for the Committee on Information to do so in order to hold informal consultations. The Chairman was informed that, in the case of meetings adjourned for the purpose of holding informal consultations, the remaining time was not posted as unutilized.

6. The Committee recognized the importance of improving coordination and organization and had decided to take certain measures to that end. For example, members would be requested to inscribe their names on the list of speakers for individual agenda items early in the session and efforts would be made to compress the Committee's work. At its last session, the Committee had decided to recommend to the General Assembly that it reduce the duration of the Committee's sessions by three days.

7. In addition to the suggestions made in his letter, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences proposed the following:

- (a) To eliminate as far as possible avoidable cancellations of meetings;
- (b) To convene meetings in a timely manner, without a quorum if necessary;
- (c) To the extent possible, to schedule informal consultations with interpretation services;
- (d) To cancel scheduled meetings in advance, particularly if no delegation expressed a wish to speak, and to hold informal meetings in their place;
- (e) If time remained at the end of a scheduled meeting, to consider other items or to hold informal consultations;
- (f) To increase efforts to improve the accuracy of forecasting the number of fully serviced meetings required.

Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean

8. The Chairman of the Committee on Conferences met with the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean on 6 July 1993. The Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee noted that, during its last session, that body had held 17 of the 20 meetings scheduled. The secretariat of the Ad Hoc Committee had notified the Office of Conference Services of the three cancellations so that the services could be reassigned.

9. The Ad Hoc Committee had made considerable progress in shortening the duration of its session from six to two weeks, and continued to assess its needs regularly. While the mandate of the body had changed in 1992 to reflect international developments, and certain aspects of its work had yet to be defined by the First Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee would, in future, consider a further reduction, possibly by half.

10. As to the low rate of utilization owing to late starts, that problem had often been due to the overlap of meetings of other bodies with those of the Ad Hoc Committee, which had made it difficult for members to arrive punctually.

Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting
the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs
of the Occupied Territories

11. On 6 July 1993, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences met with the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The Chairman of the Special Committee noted that, owing to the particular nature of the Special Committee's mandate, e.g., the need to interview as many as 50 witnesses at a time and to travel to various locations, it was not possible to schedule in advance the time or venue of meetings. Night meetings were frequently necessary to comply with the witnesses' schedules or needs. In reply, it was explained that the statistics reviewed by the Committee on Conferences reflected the utilization of conference-servicing resources at Geneva, not in the field.

12. The Chairman of the Special Committee noted that one aspect of that body's work at its January session, i.e., the review in detail of press reports for inconsistencies, was particularly time-consuming. None the less, at its upcoming August session it would consider the possibility of reducing the duration of the January sessions from five to three or four days. The Special Committee was aware of the concerns of the Committee on Conferences and would spare no effort to make the most effective use of conference-servicing resources.
